Not of the Race of Adam

By The Unreliable Narrator

Of browneis and of bogillis ful this buke.

Fairies — the Little People, the People of Peace; the Sìth; the Tuatha dé Danaan — are an interstitial race. They lurk around the edges, on the borderlands and in the margins, and out the corner of your eye … Scotland is blessed with more peripheries (and peri-fairies) than most other nations, so it's no surprise to find their tracks scattered across this country's stories, and laced into its history.

"Jorinde and Joringel in the Witch's Wood" (1909) by John Duncan [Wikimedia Commons]

Let me begin by stating that I, for one, have nothing but respect for these good folk. In 2005, metropolitan media sniggers accompanied a story of a property developer in Perthshire, prevented from bulldozing a certain rock by the fairy concerns of certain locals. No matter that planning permission was actually withheld for reasons more archaeological than paranormal: let the record show that at least one jocular journalist was shortly afterwards found wandering in the heather, shoeless and bereft of wits, and from that day to this he has not sold a single other word. Perhaps, like Thomas of Erceldoune, the fairies pinned on him the gift of speaking only truth — a fateful curse for a newspaperman. So I'll keep a civil tongue: politeness, after all, costs nothing.

Fairies come in all shapes and sizes. Now *there's* an understatement. Are they a

race? Or a set of races? Or possibly a genus, family, order, class or even phylum, given the variety of reported behaviours, properties and anatomies? In the oldest stories, swirling out of Gaeldom's deepest memory, they are bright and bold: warrior-magicians from Tír na nÓg, trailing clouds of red gold and godhood. Time and telling wear them down, eroding their magnificence; they begin to shrink, to cloak themselves with glints and glamours. Some sink beneath the earth, others slip into pools and streams and ride the rolling ocean. Yet more decline into poverty, to scratch out meagre livelihoods in barns and cots; and some end up, at last, as mere puffs of thistledown and nonsense, like J. M. Barrie's Tinkerbell — an unchancy creature still — or the cut-out fairies of Cottingley, that danced inside the head of the man behind the brains of Sherlock Holmes.

Resistant to classification, it's often easier to say what they are not: not human, not angelic nor demonic — but so widely attested to that even a universal Church could not shut them out entirely. Life's grand junction may lie where the steep and narrow ascending Path of Righteousness diverges from the smooth, broad, gentle, downward slope of the Path of Wickedness — but part the greenery between, and you might see a third road that winds about the fernie brae, for those too arch for Heaven and too canny for Hell. No wonder that route has held such appeal for writers down the ages.

Offered here is the merest glimpse of Scotland's fairy parade. Andrew Teverson leads off with an exploration of one Scottish scholar's yearnings and anxieties in **'A Shy and Fugitive People': Andrew Lang and the Fairies**; we follow with David Melville, who rings the bells of Charles Nodier's Scottish fantasia in ***La Vague des Passions*: Charles Nodier and *Trilby***. Next up in our antic procession, Marina Dossena unfurls **The Lore of the People: Language, Legends and Superstitions in the Corpus of Modern Scottish Writing and Beyond**, and close behind rides Sarah Dunnigan with **From Fairy Queens to Ogresses: Female Enchanters in Early Scottish Literature**. Lizanne Henderson strides out to display **The (super)natural worlds of Robert Kirk: Fairies, Beasts, Landscapes and Lychnobious Liminalities**; not to be outdone, Donna Heddle exposes **Selkies, Sex, and the Supernatural** to the light of day. And dancing at the tail is Charles Snodgrass, with **Fairies, Faith, and Fatherland in James Hogg's *The Brownie of Bodsbeck***, arm in arm with Maggie Scott's etymological elaboration of **Bogle** as our Scots Word of the Season. Surrounded by a clamouring throng of **book reviews**, and a guide to

the **Best Scottish Books of 2016**, this is a bonny company indeed.

Hugh Miller, in his geological study of Scotland, *The Old Red Sandstone*, reports a late-eighteenth century sighting, by two children, of "a long cavalcade […] The ponies were shaggy, diminutive things, speckled dun and grey; the riders, stunted, misgrown, ugly creatures, attired in antique jerkins of plaid, long grey cloaks, and little red caps". When the last rider passed by, the boy plucked up the courage to ask what sort of man the rider was, and where he was going. "'Not of the race of Adam,' said the creature, turning for a moment in his saddle; 'the People of Peace shall never more be seen in Scotland.'"

Of course, that was then, and this is now …

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